

MANUKA HONEY & MASCARPONE MACARONS

(from the Bewitching Kitchen)

For the shells:

200g Icing/powdered sugar

115 g almond flour

115 g egg whites at room temperature (approx. 4 eggs)

1/8 tsp of cream of tartar (optional)

100 g granulated sugar

¼ tsp vanilla paste or extract

gold or yellow food gel color (I used gold from Sunny Side Up Bakery)

For filling:

30 g unsalted butter softened

60 g mascarpone cheese, at room temperature

1 tbsp manuka honey (or another intense honey)

185 g powdered sugar

1/8 tsp lemon oil or extract

milk (if needed, very small amount)

Line 3 heavy baking sheets with parchment/baking paper or Silpat mats. Layer the powdered/icing sugar and ground almonds/almond meal in a food processor. Pulse until the mixture looks like fine meal, about 12 pulses. Pass through a sieve and transfer to a small bowl or to a sheet of parchment/baking paper. Set aside.

Place the egg whites and cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Make sure that the bowl and the whisk are impeccably clean. Starting on medium speed, whip the whites with the cream of tartar until they look like light foam. The whites should not appear liquid. The foam will be light and should not have any structure.

Slowly rain in the granulated sugar in five additions, trying to aim the stream between the whisk and the side of the bowl. Turn the speed up to high. Continue to whip the meringue until it is soft and shiny. It should look like marshmallow creme (marshmallow fluff). Add the vanilla and food colors. Whip the egg whites until the mixture begins to dull and the lines of the whisk are visible on the surface of the meringue. Check the peak. It should be firm. Transfer the whites to a medium bowl.

Fold in the ground almond/almond meal mixture in two increments. Paint the mixture halfway up the side of the bowl, using the flat side of a spatula. Scrape the mixture down to the center of the bowl. Repeat two or three times, then check to see if the mixture slides slowly down the side of the bowl. Put the mixture in a piping bag fitted with your choice of piping tip (round, ¼ or ½ inch in diameter or 6 – 12 mm). If you don't have a macaron mat, draw circles on baking/parchment paper about 2inches/5cm in diameter & turn the paper over before placing on the baking sheets. Pipe shells, I like to count numbers in my

head and use the same count for each shell so they end up similar in size. If making snowmen, make a template with two circles joined together to form head and body, and pipe each section.

Slam each sheet hard four to six times on the counter/worktop. Let the unbaked macarons dry until they look dull but not overly dry. Drying time depends on humidity. In a dry climate, the macarons can dry in 15 to 20 minutes; in a humid climate, it can take 35 to 40 minutes.

While the macarons are drying, heat the oven to 300 F. Bake one sheet at a time on the middle rack. Check in 11 minutes. If the tops slide or move (independently of the 'feet' when you gently twist the top), then bake for 2 to 3 more minutes. Check one or two. If they move when gently touched, put them back in the oven for 1 to 2 more minutes until they don't move when touched. Let the macarons cool for 10 minutes before removing from the pan. The macarons should release without sticking.

For the filling, use a hand-held electric mixer and whisk the butter and mascarpone cheese until creamy. Add the honey and lemon extract, whisk a minute longer. Add the powdered sugar, whisk in low-speed at first, then increase speed and whisk until creamy and smooth. If needed, add a very small amount of milk or heavy cream.

Assemble the macarons: find two macarons similar in size and add a good amount of filling to the bottom of one of them. Place the other on top and squeeze gently to take the filling all the way to the edge. Store in the fridge for 24 hours for perfect texture.

Decorate with Royal icing bees if desired.